

Thermal and Structural Test Results For A Venus Deep Atmosphere Instrument Enclosure^{*}

Jeffery L. Hall[†], Paul D. MacNeal[‡], Moktar A. Salama[§], Jack A. Jones^{**} and Matthew Kuperus

Heun^{††}

Jet Propulsion Laboratory, California Institute of Technology

Pasadena, California, 91109-8099

Nomenclature

a,b = curve fit constants

T = temperature, °C

T_{ref} = curve fit reference temperature, °C

κ = thermal conductivity, W/m-K

κ₀ = thermal conductivity at reference temperature, W/m-K

Introduction

In situ exploration of the surface and deep atmosphere of Venus is impeded by an environment that is hostile to scientific instruments. Temperature, pressure and corrosion protection must be provided to ensure survival of instruments and electronics for even short

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[†] Staff Engineer, Advanced Thermal and Structural Technology Group. Senior member AIAA.

[‡] Senior Engineer, Instrument Structures and Dynamics Group. Member, AIAA.

[§] Principal Engineer, Instrument Structures and Dynamics Group. Associate Fellow, AIAA.

^{**} Principal Engineer, Advanced Thermal and Structural Technology Group. Senior member AIAA.

^{††} Currently with Global Aerospace Corporation, Boston, MA.

Pioneer-Venus atmospheric probes, used a combination of titanium pressure vessels and thermal insulation for this purpose.¹⁻² Recent work has investigated the possibility of using a balloon to deliver a small payload into the deep atmosphere of Venus for surface imaging and atmospheric investigations.³⁻⁶ However, smaller payloads suffer from reduced volume to surface area ratios and therefore heat up more quickly. This disadvantage has motivated the development of more efficient thermal insulation that retains the simplicity of design and operational robustness needed in the current era of smaller and cheaper space missions. The solution of using vacuum multilayer insulation (MLI) was originally suggested in the context of a novel Venus balloon mission concept capable of multiple descents into the hot lower atmosphere.⁷ However, concerns about the efficiency of MLI on small spherical enclosures with multiple penetrations and the difficulty of ensuring the necessary high vacuum under Venus atmospheric pressure and temperature conditions led to a more robust alternative idea using fiberglass insulation with the void space filled with low thermal conductivity xenon gas. The present work investigated the performance of this xenon filled fiberglass insulation in conjunction with a new, low thermal conductivity internal structure. A full scale prototype was constructed and tested at simulated Venus surface temperature and pressure conditions. Also, a centrifuge test was performed to verify the ability of the structure to tolerate the expected deceleration load upon entry into the venusian atmosphere. The details of the design and the test results are presented herein.

Prototype Design and Construction

The prototype design was guided by the mission specification of protecting 15 kg of payload at Venus surface conditions of 460 °C and 9.2×10^6 Pa (92 atmosphere) pressure. Optimal performance of the camera and other electronic components requires a near-Earthlike

state, namely 10^5 Pa pressure and 20 °C temperature. In order to meet the mission requirement of 1 hour residence time near the surface of Venus, it was necessary to limit the heat flow to the payload to less than 100 W. The other key design driver was the need to survive typical deceleration loads when the probe enters the venusian atmosphere from space. A nominal value of 250 g's was selected for the prototype design based on the Pioneer-Venus experience^{1,2} and current mission studies.⁶

The prototype is based on a concentric sphere design in which the payload is located within the inside sphere and thermal insulation is located in the annulus between the spheres. An expanded view of the enclosure is shown in Fig. 1 and a list of component masses is presented in Table 1. The spherical shape was selected because it results in the lightest structure per unit volume for withstanding external buckling loads, a fact that led to its use on the earlier Pioneer Venus probes. Like those earlier probes, titanium alloy Ti-6Al-4V was selected for the outer sphere because of its excellent strength to weight ratio and its ability to tolerate the sulphuric acid found in the clouds of Venus. The nominal diameter is 38 cm and the shell thickness is 0.38 cm, giving a diameter-to-thickness ratio of 100. Given an expected buckling failure mode, this shell has a computed 1.3 pressure safety factor at 460 °C. For comparison, the Pioneer-Venus probes used a slightly less conservative design for which the diameter-to-thickness ratio ranged from 116 to 136.¹

The Type-304 stainless steel internal sphere is 30 cm in diameter with a wall thickness of 0.76 mm. The structure used to connect the inside and outside spheres consists of three sets of rigid Ti-6Al-4V struts. The first is a single, thin-walled conical structure rigidly connected the spheres at their south poles. This “aperture cone” is welded to the outer sphere and has a flange onto which the inside sphere is bolted. It is inside of this aperture cone that the camera window

would be located in a fully functional probe. The second part is an array of six thin-walled Ti-6Al-4V struts arranged around the aperture cone. These six struts are welded to the outer sphere but have a nominal 0.5 mm gap at the inside sphere under 1g loading. The concept is that when high deceleration loads are encountered, the inside sphere will elastically deform and contact the six struts at which time they will share the structural load with the aperture cone. The aperture cone can therefore be designed with a thinner wall (0.5 mm) since it does not have to support all of the load by itself. The key advantage of this design is that the heat flow to the payload is minimized because not only does the Ti-6Al-4V alloy have an extremely low thermal conductivity (7.3 W/m-K at 20 °C), but the six secondary struts do not contact the internal sphere at all during operation in the hot lower atmosphere. The third set of struts consists of three thin-walled Ti-6Al-4V tubes that are bolted near the equator of the spheres in a tangential direction. This provides side-loading and torsional support during the crucial atmospheric entry phase.

The payload is simulated by a 15.6 kg aluminum block that is bolted to both an axial support tube and the flange of the inside sphere (Fig. 1). A small gap exists between the aluminum block and the inside sphere flange to ensure that the primary loading path is through the support tube and onwards to the aperture cone and outside shell.

Thermal insulation is provided by micro-fiber felt composed of borosilicate glass fibers without any binder. Three sheets of thickness 1.3 cm and nominal density 96 kg/m³ were used between the spheres. A total of three different insulating configurations were tested: air filled insulation, 99.9% pure xenon gas filled insulation, and 99.9% xenon gas filled insulation plus 4 layers of two-sided, aluminized mylar (MLI) placed between the insulation sheets and at either end.

Four Type K thermocouples were cemented onto the outside of the enclosure to measure external temperatures. In addition, eight precision integrated circuit temperature sensors were mounted inside, three to measure temperature on the inside sphere and five on the simulated payload. The eight internal sensors were multiplexed with an onboard microprocessor and transmitted through the two spheres via electrical feedthroughs. This signal was further multiplexed with the external thermocouple data and subsequently recorded on a portable computer with a nominal sampling time of 10 s.

Test Results and Discussion

The prototype successfully passed all three structural tests without damage. The first was a 25 °C pressure test to 12 MPa (1740 psi) to simulate 1.3 times Venus surface pressure on the outside of the enclosure. This test was conducted in a remote facility consisting of a pressure vessel into which the prototype was placed. Nitrogen gas was injected between the pressure vessel and the prototype over a 40 minute period until full pressure was achieved. The second test was a combined pressure and temperature test to 9.2 MPa and 460 °C, which is the Venus surface condition. The remote facility from the first test was modified for this experiment to include electric heaters inside the pressure vessel and around the prototype. Pressure and temperature were simultaneously increased over a 75 minute period until maximum conditions were attained. The third experiment was a centrifuge test at 250 g's. For this test, the enclosure was oriented such that the polar axis was aligned with the acceleration vector. Although the primary structure was undamaged during these tests, the electrical feedthrough in the outer shell was observed to leak under pressurization. This leak served to contaminate the xenon gas filled

insulation and therefore yielded unreliable insulation performance data. The reason for the leak seemed to be inappropriate design rather than a manufacturing defect or faulty installation.

As a result of the feedthrough problem, the only reliable thermal data obtained was from three heating tests done in an oven at ambient pressure. Temperature data acquired from the internal sensors was combined with the known thermal capacity of the components to yield a total heat flow through the insulation. The heat flow data for all three tests is presented in Fig. 2. The air filled insulation clearly has a much higher heat flow than either of the two xenon cases (214 W vs 98 W at the maximum external temperature of 460 °C). The two xenon cases show similar heating rates, suggesting that the addition of MLI did not have an appreciable effect on the insulating performance.

Quantification of the insulation performance corresponding to these tests depends on the details of the thermal model used to simulate the behaviour. The model devised for this study was a 1-D unsteady nodal network composed of 11 nodes: 1 for the outside shell, 8 across the insulation, 1 for the inside shell and 1 for the payload. In addition to node-to-node conduction across the insulation, the model included conduction along the outer to inner shell connecting struts based on the known strut geometry and thermal conductivity of Ti-6Al-4V alloy. The unknown in the analysis was the effective thermal conductivity (κ) of air and xenon filled fiberglass insulation as a function of temperature. An equation of the form

$$k(T) = k_0 + a(T - T_0) + b(T - T_0)^2$$

was assumed for each gas, where T_0 was defined to be 20 °C and the constants κ_0 , a and b determined by fitting the model output to the data of Fig. 2. As can be seen from the figure, reasonably good agreement was obtained by curve-fitting the data in this fashion. The resultant $\kappa(T)$ functions are plotted and listed in Fig. 3. The xenon filled fiberglass is seen to have roughly

one-third the conductivity of air filled fiberglass at room temperature, and half the conductivity at 460 °C. At 20 °C, both insulations are 0.008 W/m-K more conductive than their parent gases alone (Fig. 3), suggesting that the fiberglass itself contributes this amount to the overall conductivity. The fact that the gas filled fiberglass conductivities increase with temperature more quickly than the parent gases alone is an indication of substantial radiative heat transfer at the higher temperatures. At 460 °C the radiative component, as estimated by subtracting out the parent gas and fiberglass conductive components, is 0.034 W/m-K for xenon filled fiberglass (63%) and 0.044 W/m-K (41%) for air filled fiberglass. Note that both xenon heating curves in Fig. 3 have been fitted by the same $\kappa(T)$ function, demonstrating that the addition of aluminized mylar did not reduce the radiative heat transfer.

Finally, the measured heat flux to the simulated payload was 84 W for the xenon filled fiberglass and 189 W for the air filled fiberglass at the simulated Venus surface temperature of 460 °C. The xenon value therefore satisfies the original enclosure design target of being less than 100 W. A further 22 W for the xenon case and 46 W for the air case accumulate in the inner shell at this maximum 460 °C external temperature, to yield a total outside to inside heat flow of 106 W and 226 W respectively. Only 12 W of these totals is due to conduction through the titanium struts.

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Table 1: Mass List For Prototype

<u>Component</u>	<u>Mass (kg)</u>
Outer Sphere	10.9
Inner Sphere	4.2
Simulated Payload	15.6
Fiberglass Insulation	1.4
Miscellaneous	1.5
<u>Total</u>	<u>33.6</u>

Fig. 1: Expanded View of Prototype Enclosure

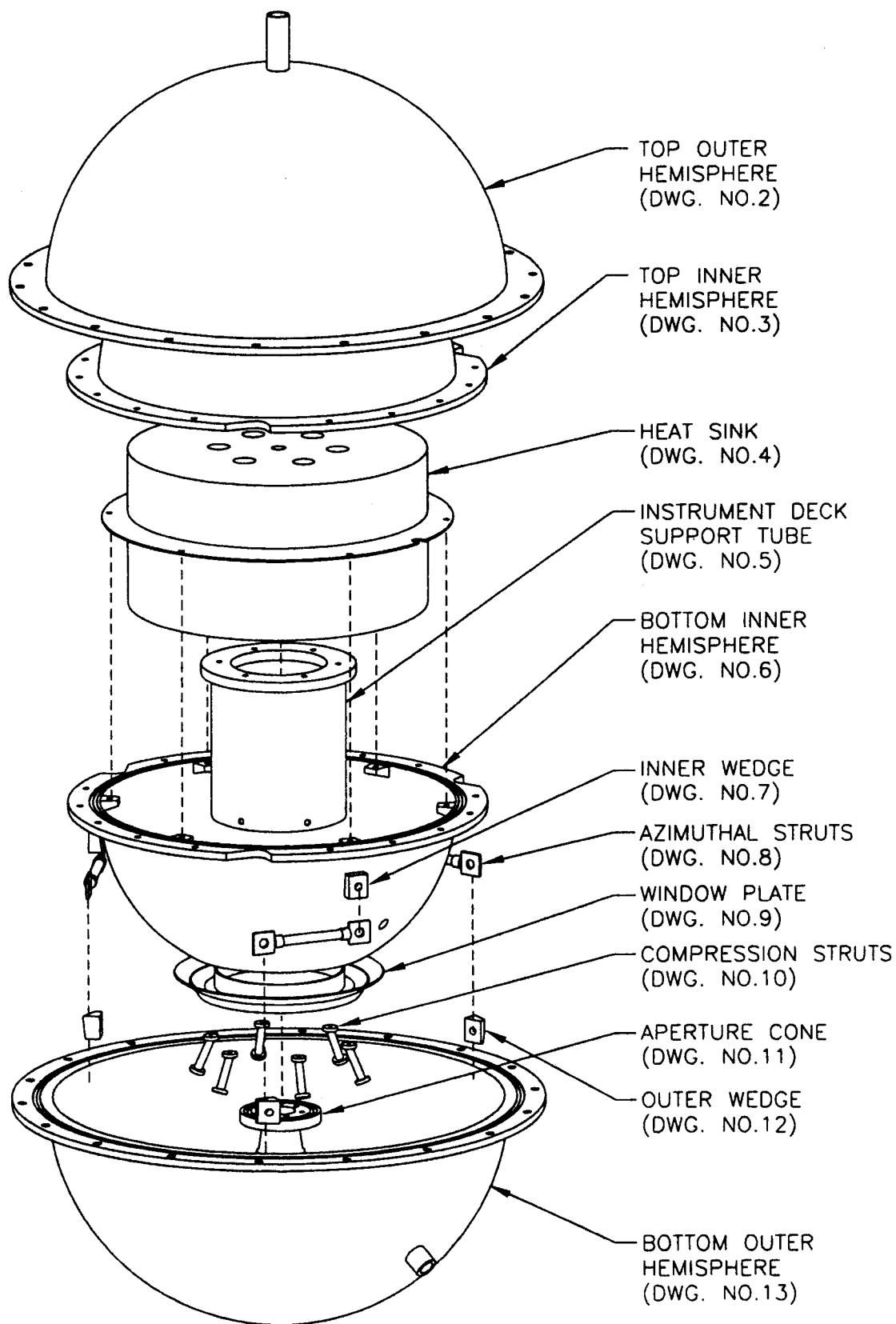


Fig. 2: Heating Data For Prototype Tests

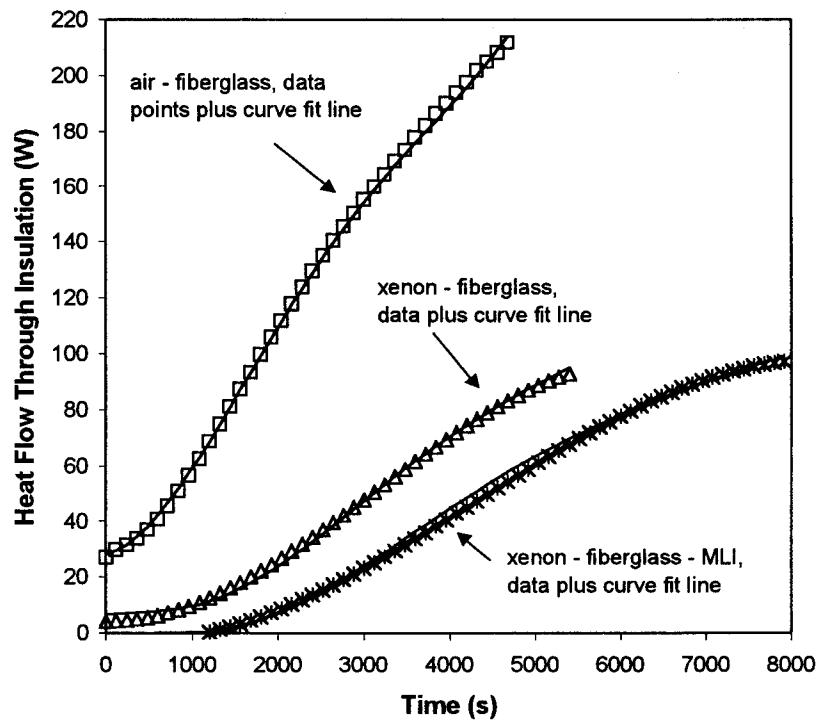


Fig. 3: Effective Thermal Conductivity Versus Temperature

